

Women's quota bill gives priority to SCs, STs

The women's reservation bill that ensures 33 percent of seats in parliament and state assemblies for women is being bitterly contested by some parties arguing for a 'quota within quota'. But the document anyway gives preference to women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

A close reading of the 108th constitution amendment bill, tabled by Law Minister H.R. Bharadwaj amid uproarious scenes in the Rajya Sabha Tuesday, reveals that even within the seats reserved for SCs and STs, priority would be given to women candidates.

The bill will be implemented in blocks.

For instance, if a state or union territory has only one seat and that is reserved for SCs or STs, it will first go to a woman. In the subsequent second and third election, women will not be given preference.

If there are two reserved seats, 'one seat shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes in the first two general elections in such a manner that that the same constituency is not reserved for women', the document states.

The bill, which comes as an amendment to Article 330 of the constitution that provides reservation for SCs and STs, provides for one third of seats for women in the total number of seats - including both general and the reserved seats.

No particular seats will be reserved; reservation of seats for women will cease 15 years from the time of implementation.

The present bill is just an enabling legislation, and parliament has to pass further laws to determine the modalities of how it will be implemented. The bill has now been referred to the standing committee on law.

The bill was introduced by various governments in 1996, 1998 and in 1999 in the Lok Sabha but lapsed each time the house dissolved.

Now, by introducing the bill in the upper house, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has ensured that will not happen again.

The legislation also provides for quotas for women in nominated seats.

'One seat shall be reserved for nomination of a woman of Anglo-Indian community to every house constituted after first two general elections and no seat shall be reserved for the women of that community in the house constituted after the third general elections,' it states.

The legislation is not applicable to the Rajya Sabha and the legislative councils in states.

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